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One Hundred Theses

on

The Foundations of Human Knowledge

By

Merwin-Marie Snell

21-12-11



Dr. Charles H. Elish,
with the compliments
of the author,
Herbert-Maria Sull.

ONE HUNDRED THESES

ON

THE FOUNDATIONS OF HUMAN
KNOWLEDGE

BY

MERWIN-MARIE SNELL

Veritas proprie invenitur in intellectu humano.

S. THOMAS AQUINAS, *De Veritate*,
Quæst. I., Art. IV.

God offers to every mind its choice between truth and
repose. Take which you please.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON, *Essay on Intellect*.

3
Washington, D. C.
Published by the Author
MDCCCXCI.

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PREFACE

The following theses, which have been prepared primarily as subjects of discussion for a private class in the philosophy of religion, are published in order that they may be passed through the alembic of a wider criticism before being made the basis of a monograph, to be called *The Keys of the Two Kingdoms*, which it is the author's hope to elaborate during the coming twelvemonth.

Neither the present pamphlet, nor the more pretentious work in which such of its elements as may survive the critical ordeal are to be embodied, is directly intended for the propagation of any existing philosophy or the formulation of a new one.

The main object in view is the indication of a clear and sure road through the labyrinth of mutually destructive philosophies and isms which confuse the minds of those noblest of inquirers who

dare to interrogate every teacher, and who are ready to sacrifice even their ancestral theogonies or their dearest negations on the altar of Eternal Truth can they but discover its Temple.

It may be that they will serve also to rouse into activity one here and there among that still larger class who have fallen a prey to the languid latitudinarianism of this *fin de siècle*, and have given up the search for truth as a wearisome and hopeless task.

If any originality in method should seem, to some over-indulgent reader, to entitle the catena of thoughts here presented to the rank of a philosophical system, he may designate it, for convenience sake, as an Analytical philosophy, in view of its method, or a Pragmatic philosophy, in view of its aim.

Its author seeks no disciples. If by its means any one shall be enabled to gain a foothold on the rock of temporal and eternal certitude, let him praise the Eternal and go his way. But if he de-

sires to become a true metaphysician, he must place himself at the feet of the Angel of the Schools, the great Master of sound and wholesome philosophy.

ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

Is it a mere coincidence that the Church honors to-day the Archangel Raphael? The circumstance may at least suggest the sweet appropriateness of taking as our heavenly patron during our intellectual pilgrimage that golden spirit who watches always

“ By the sealed and secret Fountain,
In the midst of the Abyss,
Where God's love of human nature
Springs to life and light and bliss,”

Feast of St. Raphael,
1891.

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THE SEVEN STADIA OF THE ARGUMENT

- I.—**SKEPSIS.** [*σκέψις*, examination, doubt.] Philosophic doubt.
- II.—**ANALYSIS.** [*ἀναλυσις*, resolution of a whole into its parts.] Examination of the bases of knowledge in consciousness.
- III.—**PISTIS.** [*πίστις*, faith.] Recognition of the principle of sovereign verity, or the trustworthiness of our own natures, as the ultimate ground of certitude.
- IV.—**CATABASIS.** [*κατάβασις*, a descent.] The consequent acceptance of the testimony of the senses as to the existence and attributes of the exterior world.
- V.—**AGNOSIS.** [*ἀ-* privative, *+ γνῶσις*, knowledge.] The admission of the impossibility of constructing by reason and observation any tenable system of religious or ethical truth.
- VI.—**ANABASIS.** [*ἀνάβασις*, an ascent.] The recognition of the existence of a revelation, without which our spiritual and moral sense, our aspirations and our hopes, could never attain the objects to whose existence and attainability they testify.
- VII.—**GNOSIS.** [*γνῶσις*, knowledge.] The demonstration of the Living Church to be the infallible medium of revelation, and that consequent act of supernatural faith which opens up the whole realm of divine Truth and transcendent Beauty, in the depths of whose sublime mysteries alone the intellect and will can find their perfect beatitude.

PROPADEUTIC THESES

1

I. Stadium Reason is the judicial faculty of mind,
to which it belongs to test and verify.
SKEPSIS every element of human knowledge.

2

There are three possible channels of
knowledge: consciousness, observation,
and revelation.

3

Consciousness is the necessary medium
of all knowledge, and therefore in it the
foundations of certitude must be found.

THESES ON THE SOUL

4

There are certain concepts which are inseparable from consciousness ; as they are pre-supposed by every act of reason, they may be termed pre-rational.

**II. Stadium
ANALYSIS**

5

Egoity

Every conscious state involves a recognition of the existence of the ego, as distinct from every other actual and possible being ; which may be termed the sense of egoity.

6

*Principle of
contradiction*

The consciousness of the existence of the ego involves a recognition of the incompatibility of being and not-being ; *i. e.*, the principle of contradiction.

7

Spirituality

The unity of consciousness implied by the sense of egoity requires as its basis a simple and unextended substance, or spiritual soul.

8

Every conscious state includes a recognition of the numerical distinctness of the ego and its own interior acts.

9

The acts or states of the ego are its phenomenal aspects, and the ego in which they inhere stands to them in a noumenal relation: every recognition of the ego as the common subject of all its acts is a direct and immediate cognition of the noumenon which underlies the phenomena of thought and emotion.

*Noumenon
and
Phenomenon*

10

The consciousness of the distinction between the ego and its acts is accompanied by a recognition of their relation to each other as cause and effect.

Causality

11

The consciousness of the causal relation of the ego to its acts includes a recognition of the self-directive energy of the ego; *i. e.*, the freedom of the will.

Freedom

14 THE FOUNDATIONS OF HUMAN KNOWLEDGE

12

Evidence These pre-rational concepts, because they are pre-rational, cannot be categorically demonstrated, but are self-evident.

13

Natural faith The acceptance of self-evident truth involves an implicit act of faith in sovereign verity.

**III. Stadium
PISTIS**

14

If we are under a reign of truth, we are bound to accept all the constant data of consciousness as veracious ; if not, we are bound to reject them all, even the principle of contradiction.

15

*Extension
of certainty* The same certainty which we feel regarding the principle of contradiction—that a thing cannot be and not-be in the same sense at the same time—must be extended to every other innate idea or datum of consciousness.

16

All men implicitly and instinctively make an act of faith in sovereign verity, and naturally accept as most certain every pre-rational concept and every other notion which is a part of human nature.

*Faith
instinctive*

17

The negation of these concepts or notions, or any of them, is only possible as a pure speculation, and only at intervals of ratiocination; for those who deny them most strenuously take them for granted in all the ordinary circumstances of life.

*Negation
purely
speculative*

18

This negation results from an imperfect skepsis, and a consequent neglect of a careful analysis and verification of the data of consciousness as the basis of all knowledge.

19

Such negation destroys itself, for every negation, no less than every affirmation, whatever be its object, presupposes consciousness with all its data, and the principle of sovereign verity with all its consequences.

*Negation
negated*

THESES ON NATURE

20

No datum of consciousness is more clear and universal than its assurance of the objectivity of sense-impressions.

**IV. Stadium
CATABASIS**

21

Objectivity

As we are under a reign of truth, our senses must be veracious in assuring us of the existence of objects exterior to ourselves.

22

Knowableness

For the same reason, the impressions received from exterior objects must be a true expression of their essential natures.

23

This is confirmed by the analogy of our own ego, the interior acts of which are recognized to be the natural expression of its own nature.

24

As all phenomena are a true expression of the essential natures or noumena in which they inhere, form, color, sound and taste are no less objective realities than weight and cohesion.

25

Pleasing sensations are manifestations to human consciousness of beauties inherent in the objects which cause them; that, for example, which charms us in a sunset or an oratorio is not merely subjective, but exists in the things themselves independently of a witness or a hearer.

Beauty

26

The scientific explanations of the mechanism of sense-perception do not in any way throw doubt upon the objective reality of the phenomena perceived, but merely elucidate one aspect of the process by which we become cognizant of them.

Physics

THESES ON DEITY

27

Force

The word *force*, as used in natural science, must be understood to signify the unknown cause of a given sequence of phenomena.

28

*Unity of
causation*

The discovery of the correlation of forces signifies that all sequences of phenomena in the material world are produced by one and the same unknown cause.

29

*Causation
by will*

All the phenomena of whose origin we have a direct knowledge are produced by will, thence we may legitimately conclude that other phenomena of whose origin we have no direct knowledge are likewise produced by will.

30

Since all phenomena of nature are produced by one cause, and since that cause is will, it follows that there is one supreme *One Will* Creative Will.

31

All the activities of will directly known to us increase in complexity according to the degree of intelligence which governs them ; the activities of nature are incon- *Supreme* ceivably complex, therefore the Will *Intelligence* which creates them is governed by 'a supreme Intelligence inconceivably superior to our own.

32

As we know will and intelligence to be modes of the activity of being, it is evident that the Supreme Intelligence and *Supreme Being* Will must reside in a Supreme Being.

33

Our bodies, like all other objects in the material world, are only known to us through the senses.

34

Our bodies are composed of innumerable living cells, whose ordinary activities are in most cases neither recognizable by our consciousness nor controllable by our will.

35

*Creator of
body*

Those phenomena of bodily life not generated by our own will must be the products of the Supreme Creative Will.

36

Our soul-life is intimately associated with the life of the body, and, at least under existing conditions, is dependent upon it.

37

We observe that the bodily life is manifested before that of the soul, but that the manifestation of the latter invariably ensues, and that soul and body together form but one living being.

38

Since all the material universe, including the human body, is a product of the Supreme Will, it follows, as a legitimate induction, that the soul is a product of the same Will.

*Creator of
soul*

39

If all the universe, material and spiritual, is the work of the Supreme Being, it follows that He alone possesses necessary being, and that all other being is contingent and derivative.

*Necessary
Being*

40

From the fact that the only phenomena of whose basis we have a direct knowledge are manifestations of an entity numerically distinct from the Supreme Being, we can justly conclude that all other phenomena of which we are cognizant are manifestations of entities equally distinct from Him.

*Contingent
being*

41

This is made certain by the considerations that we necessarily perceive them as distinct entities, and that the trustworthiness of this perception is guaranteed by the fact that we are under a reign of truth.

THESES ON RELIGION

42

The sense of oughtness is a constant element in human nature.

43

Duty

The sense of oughtness points to a norm of duty.

44

The religious instinct is likewise a constant element in human nature.

45

Wor

The religious instinct points to a mode of worship, and a means of communication with Deity.

46

The desire for religious knowledge—knowledge regarding man's origin and destiny, the Supreme Being, and the spiritual world—is a constant element in human nature.

47

The desire for religious knowledge points to a fixed body of religious truth.

Knowledge

48

The desire for happiness is a constant element in human nature.

49

The desire for happiness points to a perfect beatitude.

Beatitude

50

The aspiration of the soul towards the ideal points to a Transcendental Beauty in whose possession alone it can find peace.

The Ideal

51

As we are under a reign of truth, there must exist a norm of duty, a mode of worship and of communication with the Deity, a body of religious knowledge, and a perfect beatitude in the possession of Transcendental Beauty.

*Their
existence*

52

*Their
attainability*

All these must not only exist, but be accessible to man, otherwise his nature would be a lie ; but since his nature is essentially veracious, they do exist and are accessible.

53

Neither philosophy nor natural science can discover or construct an authoritative norm of duty, a certainly acceptable and efficacious mode of worship or of communication with Deity, a system of religious knowledge, or a means to perfect beatitude.

**V. Stadium
AGNOSIS**

54

The unknowable Religious and moral truths belong to a realm which under existing conditions is unknowable without a revelation.

55

Conscience

The phenomena of conscience do not justify any modification of this position, for the supposed dictates of conscience vary according to heredity and environment, and cannot be rationally demonstrated, without revelation, to be anything more than accumulated tribal habit.

56

Neither is any modification of the position demanded by the phenomena connected with spirit manifestations and mediumship, for it is impossible to identify any alleged spirit or to authenticate its testimony.

Necromancy

57

Neither is any modification of it demanded by the phenomena perceived, or alleged to be perceived, by higher senses, through the medium of the astral light or otherwise, for it is impossible to be certain as to the true cause of such phenomena even if their reality can be indubitably established.

Occult science

58

Since the realm to which religion and ethics belong is naturally unknowable, the possibility of a revelation from it cannot be denied. Such a denial presupposes a knowledge of the unknowable, which is absurd.

59

The fact of the existence of a supremely intelligent Creator makes it certain that such a revelation is possible.

*Revelation
possible*

60

*Revelation
actual*

As religious and ethical truth must be attainable, and as it is not attainable without a revelation from the realm of the naturally unknowable, such a revelation must exist.

**VI. Stadium
ANABASIS**

61

The wide-spread belief in the existence of a divine revelation is a confirmation of the *a priori* demonstration of its existence.

62

identifiable

The argument for the existence of a revelation will apply only to one which is identifiable and self-interpreting.

63

A revelation which is not identifiable is useless, because no one can be certain of possessing it.

64

*and
self-interpreting*

A revelation which is not self-interpreting is inefficient, because no one can find out what it means.

65

There are three alleged media of revelation: books, private inspiration, and the Teaching Church.

*Three
Theories*

66

No book can be an efficient medium of revelation, for it is necessarily helpless in the hands of its interpreters.

*Sacred
Books*

67

This is confirmed by the fact that those who base their religion upon a book or books, like the Protestants and the Hindus, have no agreement among themselves as to what their books teach or were meant to teach.

68

Private inspiration or illumination cannot be an efficient revelation, for there is no way of ascertaining whether, in any particular case, it is really from sources exterior to its subject, or, if so, whether they are good or bad.

*Private
revelation*

69

This is confirmed by the fact that no agreement exists among those who base their ideas upon interior illumination or inspiration.

70

Since neither books nor private revelations, taken separately, can be an efficient medium of revelation, they cannot be so when taken together.

71

This is confirmed by the fact that those who depend upon the two conjointly are as much at variance as those who depend upon either one alone.

72

The Church

The Teaching Church may be a true channel of revelation, for her disciples agree in holding all the doctrines which she has defined as of Catholic faith.

73

VII. Stadium**GNOSIS**

But as there is an efficient revelation of divine truth and human duty, and as no other alleged revelation can possibly be genuine and efficient, the Teaching Church must be the real medium of revelation. *The medium of revelation*

74

This will apply only to the Universal Church owing allegiance to the Roman Pontiff; no other body claims to possess an infallible, perpetual and universal teaching authority. *the Universal Church*

75

A center of unity is essential to a teaching church, for without such a center it would be impossible in case of a schism to distinguish the true Church from the false. *Unity*

76

The Roman Church and its Pontiff are the only center of universal religious unity alleged by any one to now exist upon the earth.

77

Certainty

If the Teaching Church is not the medium of Divine Revelation, then all religious and ethical truth is unattainable; if religious and ethical truth is unattainable, our religious and moral instincts are false; if our religious and moral instincts are false, we are not under a reign of truth; and if we are not under a reign of truth, we have no reason for believing in the objectivity of sense-impressions, in our own existence, or in the law of contradiction.

78

ST. IGNATIUS OF SMYRNA
"EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS"

The divine and infallible teaching authority of the Catholic Church, and therefore of the Church which presides over it in the region of the Romans, is consequently no less certain than our own existence and the law of contradiction.

79

Catholicity

The facts that it alone is named Universal, that it alone is geographically universal, and that it is the only religious organization which unites within itself any considerable portion of the human race, tend to confirm this apodictic conclusion.

80

As we are under a reign of truth, the universal tendency of men to accept unquestioningly the teachings of their religious guides points to the existence of a teaching authority.

Authority

81

For the same reason the tendency of the more active minds to subject traditional ideas and current teachings to rational criticism, indicates the rational demonstrability of that authority.

Demonstrability

82

Uniformity in religious belief implies no intellectual limitation or suppression of individuality.

Uniformity

83

The intellect is limited only by its ignorance; an agreement of several intellects in the possession of truth is an expansion to each of them; the only agreement which can be a limitation is agreement in error.

Divinity

84

Differences in opinion among Catholic theologians do not imply any uncertainty in the teachings of the Church, for differences exist only upon points which the Church has never formally defined.

85

Diversity

As every known truth opens up many new questions, every enlargement of the domain of certain knowledge increases the opportunity for differences of opinion.

86

Activity

The result of the infallible teaching authority of the Church is, therefore, an increase of the opportunities for intelligent differences of opinion, and a consequent widening of the field of intellectual activity.

87

Veracity

Since man's nature is essentially veracious, his intellect can only be drawn towards that which is true ; hence it follows that error is a negation, and is never accepted for its own sake, but because it is fortuitously associated with an apprehended truth.

88

For the same reason man's will can only be drawn towards that which is good; hence it follows that sin is a preference of a lower to a higher good. *Goodness*

89

This does not palliate sin; for the Eternal has revealed to us a norm of duty to which we are bound to conform, and to depart from it is not only to choose unwisely a lower good but to rebel against the Supreme Will. *Sin*

90

As error is the preference of a partial to a perfect truth, and sin the preference of a lower to a higher good, it follows that every human idea and practice points to some truth or some good.

91

Every religious doctrine in the world must, accordingly, be either a truth or a perversion of a truth; and every religious practice in the world must be either a good and useful one or a perversion of one which is good and useful.

*The true
and good
everywhere*

92

Completeness

A perfect religion must, therefore, contain within itself a counterpart of every religious doctrine and practice of the whole human race ; but the only religion which is thus doctrinally and disciplinarily universal is the Church which alone is called Catholic.

93

Error

The truths underlying the religious doctrines of non-catholic religions do not make those doctrines true, or justify the religions which teach them ; for all truth is related, and the negation of one truth necessarily distorts all the others which are retained ; and distorted truth is simply falsehood.

94

Illuminations

The fact that the Teaching Church is the only channel of efficient revelation and consequently that the Catholic religion is the one true religion, does not necessitate the negation of private revelations and illuminations ; but, on the contrary, furnishes the only certain ground for recognising their existence, either within or without her pale.

95

As it is impossible to find a rationally tenable religious or ethical system outside the Church, and as, at the same time, the higher instincts of all men impel them to worship and to the recognition of moral obligation and an attainable beatitude, it follows that the non-catholic is forced to make a choice between his reason and his higher instincts.

Dilemma

96

The rationalist follows reason, and does violence to his spiritual and moral sense.

Rationalists

97

The non-catholic religionist obeys his spiritual and moral sense, and does violence to his reason.

Religionists

98

The Catholic obeys at once his reason and his spiritual and moral sense.

Catholics

99

Résumé

He who does not accept with child-like docility the word of God spoken through the Living Church, is bound, for consistency's sake, to repudiate that natural faith, common to all men, in Sovereign Verity; and with it to cast away every ideal, all intuition of beauty, all religious and ethical notions, all the material world cognized through the senses, and all his innate and pre-rational concepts, including the principle of contradiction, and his own existence.

100

*Supernatural
faith*

He who desires to justly possess these things, to come into the divine and universal order, to inherit the kingdom of Infinite Truth, to aspire to the possession of Infinite Beauty, to attain to union with Infinite Goodness, must first breathe forth from his heart of hearts that simple but portentous word,

CREDO !

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Few of the foregoing theses touch directly upon matters of faith. But the author desires to protest his intention of writing nothing in the slightest degree contrary to Christian doctrine. If, by any inadvertence, he may chance to have used expressions which are not in perfect accord with the faith of the Holy Roman Church, the Mother and Mistress of all the churches, he hereby rejects and repudiates them, without mental reservation, as most certainly false, absurd, and pernicious.



